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# **News Release**

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## **Last of 5 defendants pleads guilty to marijuana distribution**

The Hazelden Foundation says that marijuana remains a popular drug in Minnesota, and the last of five people pleaded guilty yesterday for his role in a conspiracy to distribute more than 100 kilograms of the drug.

Michael Richard Berry, 25, St. Louis Park, pleaded guilty Jan. 29 before United States District Court Judge Michael Davis to one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute in excess of 100 kilograms of marijuana.

According to Berry's plea agreement, from 2001 through June 15, 2007, he knowingly conspired with others to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute 100 or more kilograms of a substance containing a detectable amount of marijuana.

Four other defendants involved in the conspiracy have pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute. They are: Thomas Fischer, 47, Ashland, Ore.; Iain Albert Kane, 24, New Hope; Christopher Paul Knowlton, 25, Brooklyn Park; and Lorraine Wright, 48, Redmond, Wash.

According to an affidavit filed by the Drug Enforcement Administration, Fischer, Kane and Wright were observed during an "arranged controlled buy" on June 15, 2007, and later stopped on a traffic stop. Agents seized approximately 50 pounds of marijuana from the trunk of Wright's vehicle. A search warrant was executed at a Brooklyn Park residence from which the three were observed at earlier in the day, and agents confiscated approximately 200 pounds of marijuana, a firearm and approximately \$62,000 in cash.

DEA agents in Oregon executed a search warrant on June 18, 2007, at an Oregon residence and found evidence of a previous sizeable marijuana cultivation operation. The affidavit also states that Fischer began cultivating marijuana in 2001 and continued until his arrest in Minnesota on June 15, 2007.

If convicted, all five defendants face a potential maximum penalty of 40 years in prison and

a \$2 million fine. All sentences are determined by a federal district court judge. This case is the result of an investigation by the DEA, the Minnesota State Patrol, the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, the Oregon State Police Department, the Jackson County Sheriff's Office (Oregon) and the Brooklyn Park Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Ann M. Anaya.